

Friday, May 25, 2012  
C-II\My version 1

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I believe (at this point):

Ever since the Bay of Pigs, the Kennedy brothers were determined to remove Castro "by any means necessary." A covert campaign to do this, code-named Mongoose, was authorized in November, 1961, under the direction of Ed Lansdale. He was to be supervised by Bobby Kennedy, as part of the 40 Committee. (With the addition of RFK, it was known as the Special Group (Augmented)).

In one of its first internal documents, Mongoose was described by Lansdale as requiring the commitment of American combat forces, eventually—an American invasion of Cuba—to achieve its goal of replacing the Castro regime "with one that meets the needs and desires of the Cuban people," i.e., a pro-American regime.<sup>i</sup>

In line with this assumption in Mongoose (of the need for invasion), Kennedy reportedly directed that invasion plans for Cuba be prepared in November, 1961, at the same time as authorizing Mongoose, and several alternative plans were formally reviewed by Kennedy five different times during 1962.<sup>1 ii</sup>

Shortly after this Mongoose statement, Kennedy (or, the brothers, with RFK directly supervising) approved the Mongoose planning *short of* planning for invasion. That planning, however, continued under the JCS in parallel with Mongoose, with Lansdale (whose office was in the Pentagon, in the Office of Special Operations in OSD) coordinating closely with the military.

It was at Lansdale's request (possibly at the suggestion of RFK; or it might have been the JCS) that the Northwoods memorandum was prepared listing possible "provocations" by Cuba that could be provoked or simulated covertly to justify American invasion. These proposals were approved by the JCS and by McNamara for presentation to the president, and recommended by both as a basis for action.<sup>iii</sup>

According to Sergei Khrushchev and others, both Khrushchev and Castro believed with virtual certainty that Kennedy would follow up his failure at the Bay of Pigs with another attempt to overthrow Castro, and that time he would "do it right," with an invasion. This is misleadingly described by McNamara and Bundy, when they learned of it a quarter of a century later at conferences, as a "miscalculation" (though a plausible one, McNamara later "acknowledged"). This is a falsification of history. Their certainty may have been misjudged (though not by much), and it doesn't appear that JFK ever made a definite decision to invade, before the crisis; in

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<sup>1</sup> McNamara asserts this, in the presence of Kennedy, in the briefing of Congressmen just before Kennedy's blockade speech on October 22, 1962. See May & Zelikow, p. 263.

fact, he almost surely did not. But there is no doubt at all that he was determined to have the option to invade on short notice: which required, and he demanded, a great deal of pre-planning and preparation. Why short notice? (Of the two major alternative plans, one was for very short notice, perhaps five days, which meant committing smaller forces in the first waves.) That could only be in order to take advantage of some “provocation” or opportunity that offered itself as an excuse for what would otherwise look like (and be) aggressive war.

It’s striking that these contingency plans both had a target date of October 20, 1962 (Polmar and Gresham), just as did McNamara’s directive of October 1, 1962, and as did the Mongoose planning, which aimed at a culmination of its “pressures” (presumably with invasion, to accompany an uprising) in October, 1962. What could that mean—why did Mongoose have to have a particular deadline at all, especially one so soon?—other than to be able (potentially) to produce a triumph just before the November, 1962 elections?<sup>iv</sup>

It seems clear that for at least a year before the crisis (the photographing of the missiles on Oct. 14, 1962) Kennedy wanted to **be able** to invade Cuba on short notice. Khrushchev and Castro did not misread this aspect of his intentions, though they may—rightly or wrongly—have expected it with greater assurance than he did himself. In response (and they probably would have felt and done the same even if they had read his intentions closely, as being in some uncertainty as to what he would end up wanting to do) they agreed on the deployment to Cuba of Soviet materiel that could defend against and might deter an invasion.

This was after [check] Marines had actually conducted a rehearsal-exercise of the planning for invasion in Vieques, against a mock-regime of Ortsac. [NO: that one was in the fall.]

The buildup of Soviet military support to Castro’s defenses beginning in July (?) might be thought to give pause to invasion planning, but doesn’t seem to have done so at all. On the contrary, it gave the Republicans an excuse to demand a blockade or invasion, as a major issue for their upcoming election campaigns. Senators Capehart and Keating led this pressure, to prevent the establishment of a Soviet “base” in the western hemisphere.

It must be said that Kennedy himself did not pick up this banner, as he might have. There is something of a paradox here. The military planning, Mongoose, exercises and assassination planning all indicate a definite administration desire to overthrow Castro, and a readiness to rely on invasion to this end. Likewise, the warnings to the Soviets (actually, belated) not to send offensive weapons. That’s especially true of the October 2 McNamara memo to the Chiefs.

Yet JFK—who definitely did not expect missiles to be emplaced, on the basis of the reassurances from Khrushchev—did appear to be resistant to the Republican and Congressional pressures to act and definitely did not seem to have made any



decision to invade, despite the fact that the Soviet deliveries not only would have provided an excuse but would have assured (at least—and probably at most—initially) popular support in the US (though not in Latin America or Europe).

It could be that the evident Soviet deliveries—the possibility that Soviet support for Cuba meant that the Soviets were more likely to respond by pressure on Berlin—really did slow JFK up in his earlier inclination for direct intervention in Cuba. Even so, he clearly was prepared to do so if a good occasion arose: or conceivably, if the Republican pressure threatened him with serious losses in November. (JFK undertook almost unprecedented presidential campaigning for a Congressional election year, to avert such losses and perhaps strengthen his majority).

The JCS themselves seem almost surely to have been convinced by October 1, if not earlier, that the Soviets were deploying ballistic missiles. The Il-28s, with an offensive nuclear capability against the US, were discovered on Sept. 28, and by October 1 very credible reports of MRBMs were coming in. It was these that led to the pressure that culminated in a presidential decision on October 9 to resume U-2 flights over Cuba, suspended for fear of a shootdown by a SAM like that which had occurred in September in China. If the photos of Oct. 14 were a surprise to JFK on Oct. 16, they were not to SAC or the JCS (or Nitze, who had been briefed days earlier by a Navy officer).

It was the October 1 JCS meeting with McNamara that was followed by his Oct. 2 directive for advanced contingency planning. (Thus, the possibility or probability of missiles may have been in his mind on October 2, even though the memo doesn't emphasize that, mentioning it only as one of a list of possible triggers for invasion or air attack or blockade.)

[3:36 PM As Prufrock would say: It is impossible to say just what I mean! Or LeRoi Jones' hipster: He was lost\in the forest of motives...only ideas\and their opposites\ like he was *really* nowhere]

What I mean:

JFK and RFK wanted to replace Castro: kill him, create an uprising and invade and occupy Cuba, whatever it took.

The Soviet supply of weapons and "technicians" provided both an excuse and political pressure from Republicans to carry this out, preferably before the November, 1962 elections. But at the same time, they may have been somewhat of a deterrent. (Despite the pressure and excuse, JFK seems to have been reluctant to invade in the summer and into the fall).

As the buildup and pressure increased, and McCone predicted the deployment of missiles (as did, it appears, SAC and DIA and the JCS) (though CIA analysts did not) JFK chose to issue a strong warning against such a deployment. I believe (probably,

not certainly: this will be implicit from now on; it reflects a choice among speculations in the controversy among scholars and former officials, based on evidence I won't present here) that JFK did not believe the deployment was likely, but the warning might reduce a low probability still lower, near zero. (Actually, the deployment was in progress and some missiles had already arrived. CHECK)

Anyway, I think the main purpose of the Sept. 3 statement was to contradict those who were saying in Congress that missiles had already been sent or were on the way, by saying that the administration had no evidence of these (untrue: but no evidence that JFK believed) and did not expect them. At the same time, he wanted to show toughness (for political purposes, in the campaign) by saying there was a line the Soviets must not cross, or "gravest issues would arise," i.e. he would consider military action.

In other words, I think the statement was mainly meant to explain why he was **not** taking the action that others, mainly Republican, were demanding; *and* that it was not because he was a pacifist (as his speechwriter, Sorensen, gave evidence of being, having been a CO) or lily-livered. Likewise for the second warning, on Sept. 15.

Still, he wanted to be *able* to attack, blockade or invade **before the election**, if he should want to do that. Another exercise was announced after Oct. 2 as a cover for the movement of supplies and troops preparatory to such actions, if he should decide to order them. Presumably (since I don't think he had made a decision yet) he envisioned the possibility of one or more of several real contingencies:

- a) hard evidence that missiles would be deployed, or had started to be installed;
- b) short of missiles, a significant increase in the buildup of Soviet support beyond what had been seen already (short of missiles), like the Il-28s spotted on Sept. 28 (or the FROGs, that weren't actually seen until Oct. 26);
- c) a Cuban "provocation," possibly stimulated by Mongoose; or (
- d) political prospects in October that seemed alarming, providing incentive for an "October surprise" (as some Republicans were predicting, with more than a few suspecting that the eventual crisis confirmed). The first three of these—not the fourth—were included in McNamara's list of October 2.

So—he wanted to keep a **quick** invasion, or air attack, "on the table" in October, even if missiles (the least likely, in his mind) did not show up. Preparations for blockade were also directed and prepared, before October 14.

My strong hypothesis: The actual appearance of the missiles on October 14 took both air attack and invasion **off** the table in JFK's mind, after the first few hours of his initial reaction on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>. The CIA could not guarantee that none were operational even then, on Tuesday, (though they thought not) or would



not be by the next day or two, when an attack could first be launched. (By Friday, they regarded some of them operational; but it could have been earlier). Nor could they or the JCS be sure, at any point in the crisis, that they had spotted all the missiles, or more than 60% of them (where did that estimate come from?). Any they had not seen would not be destroyed in the attack and might fire subsequently. They didn't know whether warheads had arrived (they had), but "had to assume" they were available. So any attack involved some risk that one or more warheads would destroy an American city, or several. Despite what he indicated internally and what he said to the world on October 22—that he did not want nuclear war but that he was prepared to risk it if necessary—I believe he was **not** prepared to risk nuclear war—however small the risk might appear—by attacking missiles that might be operational with nuclear warheads.

That is to say that I think he was sane, sensible (unlike, say, the JCS). **He was not crazy. He only chose to appear to be.** But to make that appearance credible enough to be effective in bargaining (and in domestic politics, before the elections of 1962 and especially 1964), he had to take actions preparatory to invasion and to nuclear war, and actual acts of war (the blockade) which *did* risk a two- or three-sided war and even nuclear war, limited or all-out: though he believed the risks were less than those of an attack. (The JCS and some civilians argued the contrary).

He believed he could control those risks (unless Khrushchev reacted violently and precipitously to the blockade, which Llewellyn Thompson and the CIA thought unlikely, and which proved not to be the case, in the short run, on Wednesday morning, Oct. 24).

He did have an exaggerated sense of his own ability (and Khrushchev's) to control these risks once he had initiated the blockade and other steps. But I think he thought of them as fairly small, **given** (I believe) his very secret knowledge that he was privately prepared to make what others would regard as great concessions to get the missiles out without war.

He signaled this to the ExComm as early as October 20, in the Saturday meeting. (M&Z, 199, 201), though only as a possible option after the blockade was in place. Actually, I believe that he and McNamara believed, as much as Stevenson, that the only alternative to an attack was a "trade" of the Cuban missiles for US (NATO) missiles in Turkey and Italy (and Greece, he kept mentioning, although we had no missiles in Greece: they had been offered, but refused by the Greeks).

And although he always in the ExComm described attack and trade as alternatives (the "only two"), I believe that he secretly ruled out attack, so that a trade was what he expected. He could still hope to keep the terms down: perhaps to Turkey alone, without Italy, let alone even broader demands that Khrushchev might conceivably make. For that he needed both the demonstration of his risk-taking in the blockade—"He's got to see you move"—and continued preparations for attack.



But I think he thought it very unlikely to get, even from an ultimatum (such as RFK delivered Saturday night, and others like McCone had urged earlier: which for JFK was, I believe, a bluff), what he actually ended up with: removal of the Soviet missiles without a public trade at all. (The private trade RFK offered gave Khrushchev no perceptible benefits, and almost surely didn't influence K at all, contrary to the lesson some drew when it was revealed by RFK in 1969. Acheson saw this as "the triumph of dumb luck," an unforeseeable failure of nerve by Khrushchev (Acheson having earlier predicted that a surprise attack was "the only" way to get the missiles out). He was wrong on several counts; I always thought that the statement of a horse's ass, even before the later revelations of the dangers of attack. But I think it did come as an unforeseen stroke of luck in Kennedy's eyes, saving him not from having to attack or from leaving the missiles in place—neither of which he intended--but from making a public trade of missiles that he had thought **from almost the beginning** was likely to be what he would have to do.

He was strongly unwilling to make that trade at the outset, before and instead of a blockade, as Stevenson proposed on October 20 and 21: without "doing **something**," something bold, brave, vindictive, risky, potentially violent, in the eyes of Khrushchev, NATO, Republicans, and the American public. For that a blockade was just right, except for the unfortunate fact that it looked **irrelevant** to the missiles that had just been discovered to be already in Cuba. But apart from that (which drove Acheson wild, along with the JCS) it had all the above qualities he needed both for domestic and diplomatic prestige and politics, and for bargaining with Khrushchev over the terms of the resolution.

The blockade was risky. It could easily have led to at least limited conflict with Soviet armed forces (for the first time in the Cold War), and possibly, eventually, to all-out nuclear war. But Kennedy did accept—in fact, he was determined to incur (for the world!) those risks: which he regarded as low, though not negligible, lower than any other military alternative. It was **because** it carried some significant risk (which the public was likely to exaggerate, not knowing his determination to control its conduct and subsequent events, and his willingness to make whatever concessions were necessary to avert major escalation) that it attracted him as an essential step.

It was risky enough to make further (more relevant) military steps of attack or invasion look credible: which would not only be crucial in his dealings with Khrushchev—and keep the JCS aboard his team, keep them from leaking about his cowardice or weakness to hawks in Congress--but would scare the NATO allies into accepting the trade of missiles in Turkey and Italy without recriminations, or without as much as would be inevitable if the trade had been offered at the outset.

(See JFK in the ExComm meeting at 2:30 pm on October 22, before his meeting with Congressmen and the delivery of his speech, which was still being edited in the discussion (Minutes, not verbatim: an untaped session): "The President felt that a



better tactic was for us initially to frighten the United Nations representatives with the prospect of all kinds of actions and then, when a resolution calling for the withdrawal of missiles from Cuba, Turkey and Italy was proposed, we could consider supporting such a resolution." (M&Z, 209).

[12/20/2013: The blockade was also addressed to a key JFK objective, virtually never mentioned in accounts of the crisis: his need not to lose the nomination or the election for a second term in 1964. To have made the public trade of the missiles at the outset (as Stevenson proposed), at the outset of the blockade or instead of it, would have revealed him as someone not willing to take any risk of conflict with the aim of getting a better deal than that: removal of the missiles without any American concessions, or the overthrow of the Castro regime. It would have opened him to the certain challenge of cowardice, weakness, appeasement from the Republicans (and some members of his own party) that could well have cost him re-election. The blockade obviously involved a deliberate risking of war with the Soviets, thus disarming that charge; at the same time, it involved, in JFK's eyes, **less** risk than any of the alternatives discussed, such as direct attack on the missiles with or without warning (though others argued to the contrary, unconvincingly).

After the resolution of the crisis, the public was led to believe (really, until the tapes were released and transcribed, effectively 1997 (except for fragments earlier), 35 years after the crisis) that Kennedy had firmly rejected the very possibility of a trade (as proposed by Khrushchev on Oct. 27) from beginning to end of the ExComm meetings. This was flatly untrue, as every member of the ExComm knew.

Furthermore, this was said to be true of the ExComm as a group, with the single exception of Stevenson, who was pilloried as an appeaser and proponent of "a Munich" in the first major account of the decision-making, by Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett, in a Saturday Evening Post article that was known to have been reviewed and approved by the President.

(What JFK—and most others in the ExComm--had indeed rejected was Stevenson's proposal of offering a trade before and hopefully instead of a blockade or other military action; and he had praised Stevenson's (bureaucratic) courage to RFK for making that proposal in the group.)

Actually, the idea of "negotiations" --basically, a trade--following the installation of the blockade was frequently raised in the discussions and clearly favored by some (to their credit, I would say), though the JCS hated the idea and the Turks themselves were resistant to it. (JFK expected NATO to come around to accepting it willingly when the costs and risks of an attack or invasion were laid out to them realistically).

But I believe that in his own mind, early and late in the crisis, JFK **expected** not only to "accept" such a resolution—not just "possibly consider it"-- but to assure, if

necessary, that it would made (by Khrushchev or preferably, the UN or the Secretary-General) so that he could accept it. (It wouldn't have seemed necessary for him to propose it himself publicly: you could always do better than that. Note that he never publicly rejected the idea, or Khrushchev's formal proposal; he let others do that privately (Scali to Feklisov, RFK to Dobrynin, Saturday) and he let others lie about that later.)

On Saturday evening, Oct. 27, as Rusk revealed 25 years later, he accepted Rusk's suggestion to prepare that very evening to have U Thant make that request if and when JFK decided, perhaps by the next day. I'm saying that I believe he didn't need Rusk to put that idea in his mind. Something like it had been in his mind—to follow a few days of scaring the wits out of the UN, the American public and the Republicans, and if possible, the Soviet leadership—from perhaps Tuesday, Oct. 17, and no later than Thursday morning (when he asked RFK and McNamara privately to steer the ExComm to “consensus” on the blockade).

A week later, on Tuesday Oct. 23, the day after the president's speech, RFK sent word to Georgii Bolshakov by two separate private channels that the president would be open to a trade with the Turkish missiles. Thursday the famous Walter Lippmann column appeared, which the Soviets took to be inspired by the White House. I have little doubt that it was, though Lippmann never confirmed that.

More significantly, Dobrynin revealed—30 years later—that Bobby had proposed it to him in person on Thursday night, Oct. 25, and confirmed by a telephone call during the conversation that it had the president's approval. In short, *the proposal originated in the White House, not the Kremlin* (which had no interest in the Turkish missiles by that point, or in a public trade, until by Friday that looked like the best they might get).

In the end, they didn't get that, for reasons I'll go into later.

One reason for that is that Khrushchev had no more interest in either a moderate or a high risk of armed conflict with the US, let alone a nuclear war, than did Kennedy. Both were determined *not to initiate* violence in the Caribbean or elsewhere, above all nuclear but even conventional.

Both abhorred the idea of nuclear war (to an extreme, more than either knew about the other, more than the world or most of their own associates knew about either).

Both saw it as potentially the end of civilization and even of humanity (as it was, more than either of them could know in 1962 or for another twenty years). Neither was willing to be the author of that, under any circumstances whatever.

Neither saw the stakes in Cuba as high enough to justify to take even a moderately low risk of nuclear war. (Even though each saw the stakes for himself and his country as higher than the other realized).



Despite all that, nuclear war was very possible as a result of their joint actions. They and the world actually came very close to it at several points—closer than either knew in their lifetimes--and it could well have erupted at others.

Despite the strong attitudes above, they did feel that their personal stakes, and their nation's, justified and compelled them to take what they (mistakenly) saw as **small** and **controllable** risks of war, risks of conventional conflict and even (much smaller, they thought) risks of nuclear war. They felt that their role in their states, their alliances, their domestic politics, and in history forced them to take at least these risks, though not (as many of their colleagues urged) actions that they saw as involving significantly higher ones.

And each, going into the crisis and during it, greatly underestimated the real risks they were running (for their troops, their countrymen, and really for the world of people and many other species) and overestimated their own (and their adversary's) control of their own forces and of events.

Each of them, and all of us living then and since, nearly lost their gamble. For all living beings since then, there was, in Acheson's words, truly a triumph of dumb luck.

Dumb. A kind word for it.

Saturday, May 26, 2012  
12:39 PM

[Assorted notes:

--NSA history shows ONI had direction-finding data that some Sov ships had stopped dead in water, some had turned back: late in day of Oct. 23. (coded message had gone out from Moscow in the morning). "ONI felt this information had to be verified before it was reported." (Study, by Thomas Johnson, says at this late date, 2008, it was impossible to find out why ONI had chosen to delay the reporting).

McCone was awakened in the middle of the night with it, but it wasn't reported to the White House or the SecDef. (Nor, I take it, by McCone to them; not even at the beginning of the "tense" Oct. 24 ExComm meeting? In an intell brief?) Not passed on to them until about noon (after the tense moments reported by RFK), when ONI had "confirmed" the data. (how?)

"When he found out, McNamara was furious and subjected CNO Anderson to an abusive tirade." (This must have been AFTER his confrontation with Anderson in Flag Plot: on 23<sup>rd</sup>? When McN already said to Gilpatric. "Anderson has lost my confidence.") THIS confrontation doesn't seem to be reported elsewhere.

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There was a major Sov readiness alert, especially of air defense but involving unprecedented offensive moves, on Sept. 11, apparently on concern that missiles had been discovered (major equipment had arrived in first week in September Same day, a Tass statement that weapons in Cuba were defensive. (after Dobrynin to JFK on Sept. 4, same; leading to Salinger announcement that SAMS had arrived,(August: leading McCone to infer that they were to protect missiles); but that if offensive weapons appeared, there would be gravest consequences.)

Question: What led up to the Sept. 15 (? 14<sup>th</sup>?) White House warning, again, against offensive missiles? What worried the Soviets on September 11, leading them to a high alert for ten days?

Tuesday, 5/29/12 7:48 AM:

answer: McGeorge Bundy memo to JFK on press conference that day: the Congressional pressure is getting intense; need to show resoluteness. (Hershberg) On Sept. 11 the first arrival of SS-4s in Cuba. An intense alert, unprecedented in CW, begins for ten days in SU. (Presumably in case U-2s discover SS-4s. NSA, above, presumes they feared they had already been spotted. Not necessarily.



If American officials *had* identified SS-4s earlier—if U-2s had been flying then (when did they stop? Shootdown in China was Sept. 8) and had spotted earliest preparations for SS-4s (perhaps by configuration of SAM sites)--the *US temptation to attack them—and invade—before they became operational would have been almost irresistible*. (The photo evidence they were there would not have been convincing to laymen; but an airdrop, as considered later by Bundy, actually capturing equipment would have been convincing. This would have been part of an invasion.) Preparations for invasion were already underway.

But the invading force would have run into—surprise!—42,000 Soviet troops: and tactical nuclear weapons. (DO CHRONOLOGY OF ARRIVAL OF MATERIEL AND TROOPS). Even without these, there would have been a foretaste of Vietnam, contrary to the fatheaded predictions of the JCS. (Note that they all underrated the determination of the Cubans, as in Vietnam; they even expected mass uprisings in their support. But they knew nothing of guerrilla warfare (as in their earlier willingness to go into Laos).

The 42000 Soviet troops would have added enormously to the mess. They were even unforeseen, so the scale of the invasion would have been—the nightmare of Shoup and others—“piecemeal,” initially greatly undersized. But even this would have been irrelevant, given the presence of the tactical nuclear weapons.

By all indications of (fatheaded) Soviet thinking, both the generals and the Presidium, there would have been no need for unauthorized action to have these fired. Moscow would have ordered them, in the head-up-the-ass belief that the conflict would be confined to the Caribbean. The incentive to destroy the invading force, on the water and in the beaches, with these weapons would have been, again, virtually irresistible. It would have come from Castro and the Cubans, from the generals in Cuba and in Moscow, and from the Presidium itself. (INSANE!)

(It would be like a conventional Soviet blitzkrieg into West Europe, not just Berlin, facing our tactical nuclear weapons). If there was hesitation, from an unprecedentedly sane thought in Moscow, the likelihood of an unauthorized action would be extreme. For one thing, as the invasion approached, warheads would have been moved next to weapons even on the MRBMs, as happened on Oct. 26 or so.

There is simply no indication in the information that has come from Russia of any prior concern about the actual use of these weapons, which were for war-fighting, not at all (like the tac nucs in Europe) for deterrence, publicly known. They were (!) a “card up the sleeve,” a surprise for invading forces. There was no prior plan to reveal them at the moment when invasion expectations became intense, as was the case on Thursday night (Cuba time), leading K to write his long cable.

**That cable was the perfect occasion to reveal the presence of the tactical nuclear weapons, with warheads—and even delegation!—which were, after all, archetypal “defensive weapons” like NATO’s tac nucs (not like Turkey and**



Italy!) Jesus Christ! This was his first official admission that he had any nuclear weapons at all in Cuba: "weapons you call offensive." He could have revealed that he also had "weapons you call defensive." (These do, I must admit, fall within "non-offensive-defense"!) "So let's not think about invading Cuba. Your forces will burn: your ships, your tanks, your troops." (The JCS would then demand authorization for tac nucs and warheads to accompany their invading forces. They could even say these were to deter the Soviet tac nuc from being used. But what would deter the Soviets from using them to "protect" the 42,000 troops Khrushchev could announce at the same time! Why did he withhold this little "surprise"!

Yes, as I've long thought, Saturday night was too late for this communication. *Friday night was not.* Note that the FROGS had already been spotted. And the Il-28s. Had the FKR's? He could have put one out in the open. And while he was at it (did he even know that his subs were being tracked and forced to surface, that they had, contrary to his wishes, gone into the Caribbean?) he could have said: "Stop playing games with my submarines: they have nuclear warheads, and they may misunderstand your "signals."

All this would have been before the SAM shoot-down. (That might actually have led to a US attack on SAMS despite all this: but just to keep surveillance going, not as a precursor to attack on the MRBMs (for Christ's sake, they were operational anyway. That was enough to deter JFK from attacking them, without this message from K. JFK wasn't just "delaying" an attack on them, Saturday; he *meant* absolutely to settle it before there was any US mass attack, either by RFK's ultimatum(s) or by U Thant.)

**But the game would have been over. Match to Khrushchev.** Any member of the JCS (i.e. LeMay) who argued strongly for invasion at that point should have been fired (as McNamara meant to do, and did do, with Anderson already. Not with LeMay, note, despite his extraordinary insolence to JFK on Friday, Oct. 19. Not the right moment just then, I guess, to fire the Chief of Staff of the Air Force; McNamara didn't fire Anderson then either on the 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> for his insolence.). (Anderson was the only one—not Dennison or any member of the ExComm—to get a Time cover just after this! Bad luck!)

So there would have been a Soviet base in the Caribbean. A sub base, too. Any number of SS-5's: why stint? They would have been highly vulnerable; so we would have had, after all, a true Delicate Balance of Terror. Two sides with large, vulnerable forces, on high alert: fuel for preemption, from false alarm or escalation.

Talk of defending Berlin—by threat of US FU or escalation to FS—would be over. An East German peace treaty: Why not? Then East Germans walk into Berlin. If NATO troops there (would there be any besides American?) fired at them, they would be captured or annihilated.



This would have been feasible before the crisis if the Soviets had *had* the thousand ICBMs Power claimed they had—and had convinced us of this. McGeorge Bundy says the strategic balance had no effect on Cuba. But Berlin was an intense concern during Cuba as it was (with the balance totally in our favor: and a prospect of that changing if we accepted the not-yet-operational MRBMs in Cuba.) If they had had, not necessarily the 1000 of Power's estimate but several hundred, like us or somewhat more than us, we would not have had to worry about Berlin. We would not have been in Berlin.

And K *could* have put missiles into Cuba *openly*: to defend Cuba. Who would stop him? He had a thorough legal right to do it. Stop his ships and subs on the high seas?! Bundy says K faced superior power in the Caribbean, as of course he did. But what relevance was that? He had the law on his side: "freedom of the seas," as we demonstrated with the de Soto patrols just offshore North Vietnam.

Why should a conflict there stay limited to the Caribbean? If we committed acts of war, or aggression, piracy, in the Caribbean, what reason was there to expect the conflict to remain there? Even as it was, we feared the blockade itself would lead to a blockade of Berlin (blockade for blockade) or perhaps an attack on Turkey especially if we actually attacked a ship. Had we stopped a ship with nuclear supplies, it would have been blown up by its crew, before being searched! (Was that contingency ever considered by the ExComm? Never mentioned!)

All this was with a strategic balance grossly in our favor. If there had been **parity**, let alone a Soviet superiority in ICBMs (as was predicted, somewhat, even in June, 1961), *there would have been no talk of blockade*. (Bundy never considers that, or the other doves who asserted "lessons of the crisis" in 1972 in Time).

So our strategic superiority did give us something beyond our presence in Berlin.<sup>2</sup> It gave us the opportunity to blockade Cuba in 1962, with only moderate risk (of blowing the world up). *It gave us the Cuban Missile Crisis!* It inspired both the deployment of missiles to Cuba—K's effort to reduce our superiority--and our ability to get them out, at extremely high risk.

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<sup>2</sup> After the crisis, Brezhnev never pushed against Berlin (?) again, even though he did have parity. Did he (not) care? Even with the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968? Ostpolitik prevailed in 1971? Why not earlier? Was Berlin a particular obsession of Khrushchev himself?)\_

Our FU threats also kept SVN from an open invasion by NVN; but strategic superiority was not needed for that.

It did not permit us (given Khrushchev's attempt) to invade and overthrow Castro, who is still there, after JFK, LBJ, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan (twice), Bush, Clinton (twice), Bush, Obama. And every one of these has had to confront an active Cuban element in our politics in Florida and New Jersey. Our politics has been given a rightward push for half a century (as by Catholics on Vietnam, Jews on Israel), by Castro's emigres!

9:33 AM

So, Berlin gone. We might offer to remove missiles in Turkey and Italy, but why should K have traded away the missiles in Cuba for that? We were going to replace those anyway! And he did "need" the missiles in Cuba (unlike ours in Turkey, Italy and England), both strategically and for "defense" of Cuba. So the IRBMs (replacing MRBMs) stay there. (Would we really have kept up our blockade of Cuba, to prevent that replacement, or reinforcement?) We could have added POL, but could we refuse food and medicine from neutral countries, our allies? How long? There would be no more threat of attack (against SAMS, either); no more surveillance! Would the world let us "strangle" Cuba?

In short, K came very close to winning, not only in the Caribbean, but in the Cold War! The NATO alliance would be transformed. Yes, nuclear weapons might remain in Europe, preserving a role for the US (and France, and England), but no longer a rationale for the US FS forces to threaten escalation *over Berlin*. (That doesn't mean the MIC would let them go). The prestige of the SU would have risen dramatically, that of the US lowered, along with its influence in Europe. A bad thing?

Suppose K had nevertheless, in his interest in reducing SU arms costs, had pursued a CTB. JFK would not have been a position—being much weaker in Congress than before—to reduce the number of inspections demanded. Could K have allowed them, as he "should" have? Gotten a CTB. (**Then, no MIRV?! Did the failure to get a CTB in 1963 doom the world to a vast expansion of warheads on both sides? Oh well, there was already one Doomsday Machine; and with Brezhnev, two.**

**But how could K have been replaced by Brezhnev, with this triumph behind him?! We would have kept K, with his desire to reduce armaments, and his appreciation of the dangers of nuclear war (except for a blind spot on tactical nuclear weapons: like Oppenheimer's!)** **Losing K—to the "benefit" of the Soviet MIC, and the arms race—was another cost of K's failure to use his winning card!**

How would the elections of 1962 been affected by this? Or JFK's prospects of physical survival? Or the Democrats' prospects in 1964? Not good; could even Goldwater have won? Or another hawk? (Keating! Capehart?) JFK probably wouldn't have been impeached, as he feared if he had done nothing (no blockade). He would have been attacked politically for letting this all happen, on his watch. Not blockading earlier, as Keating and Capehart had urged! Not flying U-2s in September (though that could have led to disaster!)



As it was, this was a case where the threat of—unauthorized!—FU of nuclear weapons, the very presence of possibly-operational nuclear weapons (the MRBMs) **did prevent an invasion that was otherwise very likely—certainly, “possible” and possibly imminent.** (This almost unprecedented, forced-draft “contingency planning” meant nothing else. And the revelation of tac nucs could have stopped it permanently. As in Israel, or Pakistan (?) or North Korea; or potentially, Iraq or Iran). Another illustration of the falsity of the precept, “nuclear weapons have no use other than to deter nuclear attack.” Even for us, they’ve frequently had other uses, and have actually been used: even, to effect (see Berlin, and probably SVN).

Bundy and McNamara said, first, “we had no plans for invading Cuba.” When confronted with the falsity of this, they said, “Oh, those plans.” “Ordinary contingency plans.” Yeah, right: with a short deadline for “maximum readiness”; by order of the president and secretary of defense, frequently monitoring their progress; with urgent prepositioning of supplies, oil and troops and transport; this, on so large a scale that it was covered by an announced “exercise,” laid on for this purpose; **all this covered by a SAP, a Special Access Program, planned only by planners cleared for PSALM!**

It was normal contingency planning, as for the Normandy invasion (which was contingent on weather, without a definite D-Day; and could well have been called off, e.g. if they suspected or realized that it had been compromised, security had been lost. Normandy planning had a special codeword, too: (see file on SCI)

As Hershberg says, this doesn’t mean that a definite presidential decision had been made, to carry it out by a date certain or at any time (contingent, say, only on weather or surprise: as the JCS wanted for an air strike, if possible). But there were a whole list of contingencies, specified by McNamara (with an open one), that could have called it into action on short notice. And precisely because they were alert for opportunities (throughout Mongoose), they needed a “fast reaction time” (from decision) plan, as called for from the beginning of planning in 1961, after Cuba-I.

That wasn’t because a fast response (say, to “warning of attack”) was “needed” militarily. The targets for invasion (or for that matter, air attack) were not going away! And they were not about to attack us. The JCS needed to be able to react quickly to an “opportunity,” a “provocation” as defined by the president (or perhaps, staged by him) so as not to lose the perceived justification for attacking at all, without being accused of “unprovoked aggression.”

(The quick “response” to the Tonkin Gulf “attack” was possible because the JCS had already staffed out the 94-target list for attack, from which the “retaliation” targets were drawn. Taylor and McNamara were unhappy when LBJ, prior to the election, let go by “opportunities/provocations” for further attack in September and at Bien Hoa two days before the election. They were cocked to attack. All this was two years after Cuba-II.

10:06 AM

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Normandy landing, indeed! The analogy wasn't only to the type of planning (better called "operational planning," than "contingency planning." Like the SIOP itself! Options, but not "contingency planning.") (And the secrecy: codeword) The analogy was to the nature of the operation. A massive, opposed amphibious landing (plus airborne).! In fact, the largest one--in the world-- since Inchon, and before that, Normandy (or the planning for invasion of Japan). (Compare to the scale of Normandy itself.)

A huge buildup of vessels offshore Cuba. Thus, total vulnerability to nuclear defense! (If some troops got ashore before the nuclear weapons were used, they would be cut off from support). There would even be negligible collateral damage: no civilians killed by the defenders! But enormous numbers of Cubans, along with Soviet troops, killed by our almost inevitable nuclear response. (Thus, great pressure on the surviving Soviet units to fire the MRBMs, under pressure from the Cubans: those that had not been destroyed by our preceding air attack).

It had long been understood that nuclear weapons made a Normandy landing impossible against a NWS: which Cuba had (still secretly) become! Not that Cubans had nuclear weapons—any more (or any less) than Germans had—but they had nuclear-armed allied troops on their soil. And (unlike Germany) they had to be attacked "over the beach." They were, in fact, an island, like Japan.

(If Japan had had "only" tactical nuclear weapons—no long-range delivery capability against the US, as was the case—they would have been invulnerable to invasion! Even though they couldn't win the war.)

Both the tac nucs and the troops turned out to be easy to hide. Neither were discovered (in scale) ever, even by the intense low-level reconnaissance after Oct. 22. So they could have been sent to Cuba by K and revealed at his discretion, without evoking a blockade, let alone air attack. The MRBMs did add marginally to deterrence of attack on Cuba, but were hardly necessary for it, given the tac nucs, which K did send as well. Moreover, in their vulnerable, pre-operational phase (when they were also likely to be discovered, if surveillance had been continuous), strongly added to the incentive to attack and invade.

Thus, they clearly reduced the security of Cuba—at least in that phase—as well as making Cuba a target in any conflict with the Soviet Union (which it would not have been otherwise). (Like our ships in harbor and our nuclear weapons in Iwakuni—if not also elsewhere—in Japan! We were "using" Japan—and other bases—just as we thought of telling Castro he was being used by the Soviets!).



Once operational, they would add to deterrence of attack on Cuba. But that would have needed no addition beyond the tac nucs! (I wonder if the Cubans who boasted, before the crisis, that they now had “nuclear means of defense”, were not referring to the tac nucs?! And indeed, if K had taken out only the MRBMs but not the tac nucs—as he initially intended to do—why did Castro have cause to be so angry? His defense and deterrence did not depend on the MRBMs. **He could have revealed the tac nucs himself, any time after the MRBMs were admitted (say, after Stevenson’s photos on Thursday, Oct. 25)!** He wasn’t worrying then that K might remove them. He could have demanded of K that they remain (if necessary, with the 42,000 Sov troops to guard them. Why **did** K remove most of those troops? It **was** a kind of betrayal of Castro to remove them, along with the tac nucs. That did leave Castro with only a “pledge” from the US, at best, and not even that given Castro’s refusal to allow ground inspection. He must have been really mad at Castro for making such a crisis over the Il-28s and threatening to resume AAA against low-level recon. Also, he was worried about leaving the tac nucs in the vicinity of Castro and the Cubans, who might some day get control of them. (?) These worries wouldn’t have arisen if he had forestalled the invasion threats by revealing the tac nucs himself (or if Castro had).

11:11

Another card in the ‘what might K have done?’ game: K could/should have revealed to Zorin, his representative in the UN, and to the world, at least the MRBMs by Thursday morning, NY time, so as to spare Zorin and the world the embarrassment of Stevenson’s triumphant revelation of the photos on Thursday. Zorin himself could have asked for the floor: or answered Stevenson, “Yes, of course, we have missiles in Cuba, as we have every right to have!”

The specific assurances to the contrary were all (highly) private, to JFK and others, through Bolshakov and Dobrynin. The TASS statement of Sept. 13 said only, “We have no *need* of missiles in Cuba.” (Not quite true, but) so what? No deception to the world! (Were the missiles to Turkey all carried above deck, for SU surveillance?)

There was no advantage to continuing to deceive Dobrynin or Bolshakov or Zorin. This is another puzzle: K’s continued reticence about the presence of the missiles (until his private interview with the corporation official) after Kennedy’s speech. Even if he wanted to continue to call them defensive, which was fair enough if he was open about them.

**Then Zorin could have revealed the presence of tactical nuclear weapons as well: *as also existed in Turkey, on Russia’s border, as well as in Germany (under nominal US control!)* GAME OVER. Zorin could have demanded that the Security Council call the blockade an act of aggression and demand that it stop! Let the US veto that! And repeat, in the General Assembly.**

Without the apparent history of deception (actually, only the private assurances of Bolshakov and Dobrynin sustain that: Gromyko didn’t really lie—contrary to JFK’s



description of it to Lovett afterwards—given JFK's failure to ask about missiles or the meaning of "defensive weapons"; and other statements were ambiguous) and the incomprehensible delay in K's confirmation of their presence once the secret had been revealed by JFK, K would have been on the high ground, legally and in international diplomatic terms. ("No, I didn't publicize it beforehand; because this piratical, illegal action by the US was not entirely unanticipated as a possibility, and I preferred to spare us all that.")

K could have announced an alliance with Cuba and/or made it part of the Warsaw Pact, as Castro (and Raul and Che) urged him to do. Again, that might have led to a blockade (certainly, to demands for one in Congress) (and greatly weakened JFK before the election: which conceivably K really preferred to avoid (?!), for future relations with JFK). Perhaps K was trying to avoid that, as by not announcing the deployment openly. Still, **this could have been announced by Zorin—or by K himself, coming to the General Assembly!—in the UN on Thursday.**

Thursday, Oct. 25, was the day that K actually decided to remove the missiles, and told the Presidium. Wasn't that before the Zorin-Stevenson confrontation? (The US had asked for a special session, as decided earlier. K could have done so, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>: or had the US already done it? K could have joined in asking.

If K had allowed Zorin to announce the MRBMs alone, unapologetically, he could have kept them in Cuba, instead of deciding that day to remove them. (That's especially true if he had realized JFK's actual reluctance to attack them once they might be operational. K couldn't know that, and yet he was implicitly counting on that as he continued urgent work on the missiles, against JFK's warnings.)

But if Zorin had announced the presence of tac nucs as well (with warheads)—which our photos also confirmed—as defensive weapons, K would not have decided to remove the missiles on Thursday, or talk about trading them at all. Or even needed a US non-invasion pledge. He would have given Castro security against an invasion, ever. (As he had already done, **if only he had announced the presence of the tac nucs!**).

The MRBMs alone didn't give Castro that, because they might be withdrawn (as happened, to Castro's shock, never having considered the possibility) or traded off for Turkish missiles (likewise, though Rusk had considered warning Castro of this possibility).

But there was no reason to consider withdrawing the tac nucs under threat; the threat simply wasn't credible, along with its having no legitimacy. Nor would there be any consideration of trading them, on either side. The tac nucs would have had to be withdrawn from Turkey and "everywhere" (a good thing, but hardly one the US was ready to entertain, or NATO!)



K had a winning card against invasion of Cuba from the beginning: and no reason to worry about its being discovered in transit or in deployment (it never was). The tac nucs were presumably operational from the moment they were deployed, along with the Soviet troops. And much as the right-wing would have screamed in the US (e.g., about an intelligence failure—a real one!—(NSA admits an SI failure, but trumpets the success of photo intelligence: not mentioning the total failure on the huge deployment of Soviet troops and the tac nucs with warheads: a failure of SI, TK, humint, and analysis! (even McCone! Even SAC and DIA, with their “paranoia” and desire to find reason to invade! Although maybe that fits the hypothesis of willful blindness: none of those wanted to find, or imagine, the presence of weapons that were not vulnerable and that precluded a US invasion! (That’s not true of the ONE analysts or INR, who also failed to imagine this, even when FROGs were discovered).

12:14 PM, 4,147 words so far today.

Why this massive intelligence failure? (I’ve been asking: why didn’t K compensate for it?!)

First, the SU had never sent tac nucs with warheads outside their territory. They’d sent FROGs, for example, many places (Egypt...) but not with warheads. (When it looked as though they might be bringing warheads to Egypt in 1973, SAC was put on alert and there was a crisis). They had, in fact, sent tac nucs to East Germany, clandestinely; when was this known to the US? But they had not given control of these to the East German forces (true?), but only to Soviet forces. In any case, Germany was contiguous to other Warsaw Pact countries, linked by land to the SU, it was part of the Pact, and was surrounded by and filled with Soviet forces.

Precisely. The analysts didn’t expect the Soviets to break their pattern, all their precedent, for the Cubans by sending MRBMs, even manned by Soviets. (The analysts **didn’t know of Mongoose or US invasion plans, nor did they realize how much Cuba meant to the Presidium, emotionally and symbolically, and as important to their global leadership**).

But above all, they couldn’t imagine the Soviets turning over nuclear warheads, on tac nucs, to anyone else, above all the Cubans. And they couldn’t imagine their deploying such weapons without being guarded and operated by large numbers of Soviet troops. **And they missed seeing the deployment of large numbers of Soviet troops.** Even after they saw the SS-4s, without a lot of Soviet troops, the analysts did not leap to the inference that warheads might also be available for the tac nuc-capable weapons they did see. And earlier, they didn’t expect the deployment of a lot of Soviet troops, so far from home and from other Soviet troops: another break in the Soviet pattern.

If they had seen the troops (by humint, SI or TK) would they have guessed that K would have sent tac nucs too? —to protect them (and as just one more break in a pattern: except that it would not have been a break in the pattern, Sov Troops + tac



nucs). Anyway, without seeing the troops, it was hard for them to imagine that tac nuc warheads would be there (just as McNamara couldn't believe that warheads were in the vicinity of the SS-4s, before there was even a fence around the missiles!)

"No large Soviet combat units, no tac nucs." Except that the reality (which they didn't imagine) was: both, large Soviet combat units and tac nucs. The analysts apparently didn't conceive that these deployments—along with the MRBMs—could have all proceeded without any SI—either or both COMINT or ELINT--or T or K or humint revelation: such "nearly (?) perfect comsec," as NSA put it (communications security: but photint, too, until site-construction had begun, and although there was humint in Cuba—much of it mistaken—there was none on the transport phase for any of the equipment or troops.)

Here's where their confidence in their surveillance, especially in SI, betrayed them. By staying off the phone and wireless, communicating almost entirely by courier both in the SU, on the way, and in Cuba, the Soviets escaped surveillance to an extent that our intelligence could not imagine. They took "absence of evidence" as strong evidence of absence: fairly plausibly, but mistakenly. (Score one for Rumsfeld, who postulated this possibility for Iraqi WMD's; or USAF Intelligence, on the missile gap.)-

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So comsec served K well in getting the missiles, troops and tac nucs into Cuba. But his continued secrecy about these not only lost the crisis for him; it could have ended life on earth. *The combination of American awareness about the missiles—before they were clearly operational—and sustained ignorance about the tac nucs could have led to nuclear winter.*

That deadly combination of knowledge and ignorance—the offspring of combined failure and success of Khrushchev's secrecy and deception--encouraged the US to blockade, to threaten and prepare attack and invasion, and (the JCS, at least) to carry out the invasion if necessary. If they had invaded, in ignorance of the tac nucs (thanks to the decisions of both Khrushchev and Castro, to keep the secret, and their success at doing so despite the efforts of U.S. intelligence and the knowledge of hundreds or more of Soviet and Cuban subordinates) the world would probably have blown up.

This is an outstanding instance of what I refer to in my book, recurrently, as the Strangelove Paradox. (I'm tempted to call it the Strangelove Perplex: a little cute, though it points to the perplexing nature of the pattern, the puzzle). A system whose only reasonable function is deterrence, which depends for its effectiveness on being known to (and believed by, credible to) the adversary; but which is nevertheless kept secret from them, deliberately and successfully. Like the Doomsday Machine in "Dr. Strangelove."



The MRBMs have the character of being (the triggers to) a Doomsday Machine; but it was K's intent to disclose them "at the UN, a month away." (Exactly as in Dr. Strangelove, by the way! It's as if Kubrick had known, in writing the script, the inner story of the Cuban Missile Crisis, though he began writing in 1961 and released the movie in 1964, before K's intentions were understood).

But K's intentions with the tac nucs are even more weird than any in the film (which is otherwise a documentary). He never intended to disclose them at all, in 1962 at least: not at the UN nor in his visit to Cuba afterward (or before the UN?)

So what the hell were they for? Why, to "protect, defend" the Soviet troops who were guarding and operating them, and defending Cuba. To use, in "war-fighting," to unveil in the actual combat as a "secret weapon" of the kind the Germans had dreamed that Hitler would turn up with. Except that their use (which Castro not only expected and counted on, but thoroughly endorsed) would **not** have been unilateral, as Khrushchev and his military, and Castro's, knew perfectly well. Yes, it would destroy the invasion force. But it would have led not only to the total nuclear annihilation of all the Soviet and Cuban troops by the US in nuclear retaliation, but to the total annihilation of Cuba! And, as McNamara put it when he learned to his horror of their presence, 30 years later, with a "high risk" of causing all-out nuclear war.

We're in the realm of craziness all around, on the Communist side. The risks that the JCS and JFK, respectively, were running were also crazy, in various ways, but in this matter of tac nucs they had the "excuse" of ignorance. Whether that really excuses them is another question—Albert Speer would say no, not that they should have "known" but they *should* have imagined, considered the possibility, investigated—but it is true that Khrushchev did his best to keep them in the dark.

And what he was doing *was* unprecedented, for the Soviets (not for us!). Clever, under the circumstances, *if he had told them*; potentially disastrous since he had not, on a scale with no historical precedent whatever. No prehistorical precedent, either, for 65 million years, ever since the dinosaurs and many other species were wiped out by a cosmic event whose effects it took our enlarged brains to duplicate on planet earth.

Crazy: Castro's recommendation to Khrushchev that if the US invaded Cuba, the Soviets should launch a preemptive first strike. As usual, the apparent craziness (which scared Khrushchev out of leaving the tac nucs in Cuba after all) combines some actual shrewdness and realism along with ignorance, as well as deplorable values.

The realism: Castro knew of the tac nucs and expected them to be used in an invasion (which he expected momentarily, based on good military intelligence; American preparations were on that time scale, though JFK had not decided and was

strongly inclined against it, secretly). Castro presumed this would lead to American nuclear retaliation against Cuba: certainly realistic. And he thought there would be a "high risk," or probably in his mind a near-certainty, that the conflict would shortly expand beyond the Caribbean, to include an attack on the Soviet Union.

So far, realistic. Moreover, he assumed that a first-strike, preemptively, by the Soviet Union against "the source of the trouble," the US, would allow very much better prospects that the Soviet Union and socialism in general (outside Cuba) would survive and prevail, than suffering an otherwise imminent first-strike by the US. Better, in other words, to strike first than second (the fundamental premise of SAC planning). He had in mind, vividly, the disastrous effects for the Soviet Union in 1941 of allowing Hitler to strike first, as he reminded Khrushchev.

Of course, Khrushchev needed no reminding of that. He, unlike Castro, had experienced that war agonizingly at first-hand, as Khrushchev described vividly to JFK in a letter that same night. But you could say Castro was right, in a sense, in his recommendation to Khrushchev, given what he knew about the situation.

But Khrushchev knew something that Castro did not know: the extremity of his strategic inferiority to the US. I was the very one who had drafted the words for Khrushchev to hear one year earlier, revealing publicly our knowledge of this imbalance: "Our second-strike capability is greater than what the Soviet Union can launch in a first-strike."

("Is that true?" Timothy Stanley, Gilpatric's speech-writer, asked me when he read my draft of that sentence, of which I still have my hand-written notes.

"Trust me," I told him. "It is.")

But Castro either hadn't heard that, or, quite possibly, simply hadn't believed it. After all, Khrushchev had been lying to the world, including to Castro, for years prior to that, apparently not aware that our Corona satellite photography was compensating for the shoot-down of the U-2. *As in Cuba in 1962, Khrushchev's bluff (in '61—he wasn't bluffing in '62, but depending on secrecy not only in transport of the missiles but in their early installment phase) was undone by American overhead reconnaissance, which he apparently under-rated.*

Castro did not have the picture, so to speak. He hadn't seen the Corona photos of the Soviet Union (hardly any foreigner had) and he apparently still took Khrushchev at his (earlier) word. He was shocked when he learned at some point that the Soviet Union had only a handful of ICBMs. He said, at the Havana Conference in 1992, that without knowing an exact number he had assumed they had a couple of hundred. Enough, in other words, to make a preemptive attack worthwhile: however dangerous, better than being struck first.



In reality, that was not true for the Soviet Union. When Khrushchev reproved Castro, on October 30, for having made an "incorrect" recommendation, he may really not have reflected on the fact that thanks to his own earlier secrecy and lies, Castro did not appreciate that reality. Castro said at the conference that if he had known that Khrushchev was *that* weak in ICBMs, relative to the US, he would never have accepted the missiles.

One might ask why Castro thought it was "helpful to the international socialist cause" for him to accept the MRBMs? Why *did* the Soviets need or want to put missiles in Cuba, if they really had something like parity, or better? (As TASS pointed out on Sept. 13, claiming they didn't need it).

He may have just assumed they had reasons that weren't obvious to him, and didn't inquire. Or he might have felt that the missiles in Cuba would make some contribution to deterrence, but perhaps (as the JCS felt!) a more significant contribution to a Soviet capability for a preemptive strike, if deterrence failed.

The latter was true, but the effect would still be suicide for the Soviet Union and omnicide for the world. Castro was wrong to believe that even with a couple of hundred missiles, "the socialist cause would be triumphant, with capitalist imperialism destroyed." That too was a widely-shared sort of ignorance (the JCS, with better reason in 1962 but still wrong, supposed that the US would "prevail" if it struck first.)

Was that ignorance really excusable? To be sure, no one knew yet of nuclear winter (the counterpart to the dinosaurs' problem). But they did know, or could and should have known, that what JFK and K were talking about as contingencies either of them might invoke meant hundreds of millions dead (actually, more than billion, without nuclear winter) and all the cities of the Northern Hemisphere destroyed "forever." In fact, they said that themselves, both openly and privately.

Was that crazy, or not? Not only for them, but for all the people who were listening to this dialog and watching the moves toward nuclear war, the strategic forces on highest alert in the Cold War, and not resisting it with all their might. The "bystanders." (Starting with our allies. But all the neutrals as well. Everybody.)

In Castro's case: he presumed, realistically, that Cuba would be annihilated in these circumstances. "It would no longer exist on the earth." But, he thought—here we're dealing with crazy values—*that was no worse than being invaded and occupied. If Cuba were about to be occupied by foreigners again, it might as well be exterminated.*

He knew many Cubans would die in the course of the occupation; so, in effect he was saying, they might as well all die. Crazy. And this, paradoxically, even though he was preparing and fully expected to fight the occupation indefinitely, until victory, with his guerrilla forces in the mountains. *That would not happen if, as he expected and encouraged, the Soviet troops on Cuba launched tactical nuclear weapons (with or*

*without launching MRBMs at the same time, as he was recommending to Khrushchev) on the invading forces.*

There wouldn't be any appreciable Cuban forces to carry on guerrilla war after that, or a Cuban population to be protected by them, and the fallout would reach into the mountains and valleys and forests.

This undoubtedly sincere "dedication"—both to the survival and victory of worldwide socialism and a willingness to sacrifice his own people in the cause, down to the last man, woman and infant—was the "romantic" in Castro (and Che Guevara) that had captivated and warmed the old Bolshevik hearts of Khrushchev and Mikoyan. But carried to a point that, at the height of the crisis, scared the shit out of them, forcing Khrushchev to fold his nearly-winning hand and eventually to withdraw his last concrete measures of real protection to Cuba, not only from exasperation (shared by Mikoyan) but for fear of leaving the tac nucs near these nuts.

6:20 PM

Meanwhile, both Khrushchev and his generals and almost the entire Presidium was making an assumption to which I'm tempted to award the prize in nuttiness: that nuclear war initiated by the Soviet use of tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba and against an invasion force offshore could and probably would remain limited to the Caribbean. That was the premise on which generals, with the assent of Khrushchev and the Presidium, delegated the decision to use these weapons to the commanders in Cuba, in the planning that preceded the actual deployment and during the deployment in Cuba, right up until Oct. 22. (The first SS-4s arrived on Sept. 4).

Granted, as the Presidium awaited the Kennedy speech on October 22 (3 AM in Moscow) they rescinded this delegation (which had never applied to the MRBMs). There is controversy among the Soviet memoirists and commentators as to whether it was truly rescinded, or whether Malinovsky simply declined to confirm delegation in writing but wanted it understood that it still stood, in case communications were out between Cuba and Moscow (which was likely, in wartime). But let's suppose it was; and that, as the record shows, the commanders were again ordered strictly on October 27 not to fire any of their nuclear weapons, tactical or MRBMs, without orders from Moscow.

(Of course, several of these former Soviet generals point out that despite this order, no one could be sure that in the heat of combat, under attack and out of communications, no Soviet unit would fire its weapon without authorization from Moscow. This was the uncertainty very much in the mind of both Kennedy and McNamara—ignored by the JCS—throughout the crisis, for the MRBMs, and they would have worried doubly, triply, if they had known of the more widely-distributed tac nucs.)



The horrifying fact remains that many weeks—into the period when, if the JCS had had their way, the US attack would have occurred (between Oct. 16, if not earlier, and Oct. 22)-- this delegation *did* exist. And at least as frightening is the fact that no one on the Presidium seems to have taken issue with the basic premise of it: that it was safe to give this authority to the local commanders, because their use of it would not escalate to nuclear war beyond the region, since these weapons “could not reach Florida.”

This seems virtually half-witted: in the minds of generals and civilians, like Khrushchev himself and other members of the Presidium, who had fought in World War II, who made this idiotic judgment not as a passing thought in a late-night meeting, but soberly over the entire planning cycle. In fact, given that they meant these weapons to be used effectively in the conflict, there were discussions near the height of the crisis of the possible necessity of giving this authority back to the local commanders.

I may seem to be using terms like “crazy” or “nutty” promiscuously here, indiscriminately, for policies I consider unwise. I don’t mean to do so, nor to be merely rhetorical. As one of the themes in this whole book, I would like to introduce the category of “crazy” decisions or expectations or values as a technical term, not so much to refer to their (usually unknown) origins as to their distance from reasonable, realistic, prudent premises even when the latter are interpreted very broadly, allowing for great latitude of subjectivity and differences in experience and perspective. I would like to distinguish those policies or values or beliefs I want to propose as “crazy” from those merely uninformed, or less than optimal, or misguided, or even counter-productive in an ordinary or less than extreme way.

This isn’t commonly done, except in rhetorical or highly partisan discussions. It seems too rude. Too presumptuous, oblivious to the speaker’s own subjectivity or bias, or agenda. But it means we don’t normally step back from a policy—even on that has led to catastrophe—to ask ourselves, *just how bad* was the decision-making that went into it? Granted, the results were unhappy (like, World War I) and “mistakes were mad,” and the whole thing was in some sense regrettable, but just how reasonable—with full allowance for context and for human shortcomings and limitations of information and perspective—were each of the premises that went into these decisions?

If we were to do that, I suggest that we should not always shy away from the temptation to recognize certain of these decision-premises as “batty,” wildly cuckoo, off the fucking wall, or possibly not only vicious or ruthless or immoral but as “crazed.” If we let ourselves accept that category—even where the premise or perception is shared by a group, even a large group (even, in effect, a requirement for membership in that group)—I think we’ll notice several things that are not intuitively obvious.

First, that the occasions that seem to qualify for this category are not extremely unusual, Second, that they especially figure in the production of catastrophes (which are not all that uncommon, either).

Third, and most surprising, we find they are not limited to “crazy *people*.” In fact, as premises, they are often very widely held by people who are otherwise “ordinary, normal” or even unusually intelligent (in other respects), elites, policy-makers. Ideas that deserve to be called “crazy” (even if the term is used in a very discriminating way, on reflection) can and often do exist in the mind of people who are otherwise smart, well-informed, even sane and shrewd.

Why make this point, or look for it? Because when we see a policy or project that looks crazy, but is the product of obviously educated, apparently well-intentioned, intelligent people, we are strongly apt to give that policy—or judgment, if it comes from such a person or a group of such persons (like the ExComm, or the Presidium, or the JCS)—the benefit of the doubt, to assume that there must be some underlying information or argument that makes sense of it, that would make it compelling to us too if we knew all the facts.

Certainly, official decision-makers tell us precisely that, about all their policies, especially the ones that seem to be failing or look peculiar. They make a point of letting us know that they possess secrets, information that cannot be shared with us (because it would inform our enemies), in light of which programs that do not look likely to succeed or which even seem criminal or wacko are actually the best available. They say that among people who share the same information they have, the opinion that this is the best, the only realistic option is unanimous. (This is almost always a lie.)

I’m saying that **if a policy looks crazy, it may very well be**, no matter how smart the people look and generally are who have promoted it. That, to me, is one of the Lessons of Vietnam, and Afghanistan, and Iraq. (I apply it to drone warfare in Pakistan.) A group of smart people can generate and collaborate on and defend a dumb policy. Even a crazy policy.

This is true not only of groups but of individuals. , A (generally) smart man can often, in certain subjects, be not only ignorant but stupid. A man who is accorded and even has earned the title of Wise Man in matters of government, is capable of not only wrong but wildly unrealistic opinions. The proceedings of the ExComm, captured on JFK’s taping system during the crisis, are studded with such dicta from the Best and Brightest and their elders.

The so-called Wise Men (several of whom had earlier been in the ExComm) consulted by LBJ on Vietnam earned that title in March, 1968, with their advice to the president to “cool it” on the war, after Tet, and to look for extrication. But most of the same men had, just six months earlier, given him ill-informed and moronic,



virtually irresponsible advice (contradicting McNamara's finally candid judgment and advice to negotiate out) to continue precisely as he was doing. (Acheson, in particular, was on both sides of this).

I have Acheson particularly in mind during the crisis. He virtually withdrew from the ExComm proceedings when it appeared likely that the president would not follow his advice for a "surgical," fast strike on the missiles without warning. That idea appealed to a number of people, including the president himself on the first day of discussion. But what was striking about Acheson was his confidence that he was right and that this was emphatically the "only" way to get the missiles out of Cuba.

Even after the crisis, when this certainty would seem to have proven unsound, he continued to believe and to publish his opinion that his was the only reasonable approach, and that the president's success with a different approach (for reasons, to be sure, which have not been obvious over half a century, and which this book means to illuminate) was due simply to "pure dumb luck."

The real problem with relying on Wise Men too confidently is illustrated by the fact that if Acheson's approach had been followed by the president, *we would probably not be here to read this*. Probably, not certainly. There might have been no further escalation, despite the killing of several hundred Soviet soldiers. There might well have been no firing of MRBMs as a result of that first assault, or even later.

But if, as is more likely (and as the JCS and McNamara both predicted, correctly in this case, I believe) the surgical attack had expanded before long to an invasion (which Acheson hardly considered), our troops would have run into a force of Soviets four or five times larger than they expected, more than half of their own planned numbers, and armed with tactical nuclear weapons.

I'm not saying that my judgment would have been, or was, any better at that time. But I was thirty-one years old. He was more than twice that and had been "present at the creation." He was, in fact, indirectly my mentor, my hero as a statesman. That he managed to sound to me like a horse's ass, in his retrospective, snotty Esquire article after the crisis was a warning to me.

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cognitive dissonance: a man is, at various times and in various subjects, both smart and stupid (not merely, expert or not, informed or not). Smart about this, stupid about that.

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## END NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> [CHECK ACTUAL WORDING IN MONGOOSE] In nearly all discussions of the goals of Mongoose and possible invasion, the notions of Castro's unpopularity in Cuba—and his status as a puppet of foreigners, the Soviets—persists throughout 1962.

This would appear to be the perpetuation of the wild delusion that underlay the Bay of Pigs project. I would have thought it had been discredited, but you can't tell that from any written material in 1962. For example, both early and late in the crisis, McNamara was saying that one reason an air attack would lead almost inevitably to an invasion was that it would trigger popular uprisings in Cuba (which presumably the US would want to support: that seems to be the implicit logic of his argument that invasion must follow: M&Z, 67)

McNamara likes to identify "miscalculations" on both sides; here's a crucial one that he doesn't seem to mention for Cuba, though it mirrored the same delusions with respect to Ho Chi Minh and the DRV regime. Lansdale himself, in the very Foreign Affairs article in 1965 that attracted my attention otherwise, describes Ho as the Benedict Arnold of Vietnam, having earlier regarded Diem as the true nationalist and Vietnamese patriot.

Of course, the assumption by, it seems, the whole ExComm (that Castro was under the total control of the Soviets (the opposite of what Khrushchev knew, or discovered, to be true) was crucial to the key misunderstanding of the AA fire against low-flying recon planes on Saturday as being Soviet-controlled. At the same time, Khrushchev's allowing the Americans to persist in this illusion cost him a potential victory in the crisis.

The American delusion led to RFK's ultimatum on Saturday night (to the wrong party, the Soviets)—"We'll attack immediately if another plane is shot at tomorrow"—which Khrushchev had to respond to by announcing the removal of the missiles, because he knew (and knew that the Americans did not know) that control of events was slipping from his hands to Castro's. Otherwise, he could have waited to respond at least half a day, during which Kennedy would probably have acceded to "U Thant's request" to remove both the Turkish and Cuban MRBMs.

ii. These apparently revamped the plan I read on the Second Fleet command ship in the early summer of 1961, which I was then told had just been newly completed by order of the president right after the Bay of Pigs. That was the first and only hint I got that JFK had not given up the objective of overturning Castro after that debacle. I put it out of mind until the crisis.

That plan certainly did seem to need redoing. It looked to me simple-minded, involving as I recall divisions simply sweeping up the length of Cuba, on either side



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of the Sierra Maestra: starting at opposite ends of the island and meeting in the middle. Something like that. I asked if there were not a plan for meeting guerrilla warfare, and the Planning Officer said, "That's a good idea; we've talked about preparing an Annex on that."

iii One of these proposed provocations by Cuba (possibly to be simulated by the US, if Cuba didn't rise to the bait) was an attack on an American ship in the Caribbean, perhaps just off Cuba.

There was, in fact, an American warship that offered itself as a suitable target continuously offshore Havana in 1962 (though McNamara and the NSA were anxious that it not be captured, like the *Pueblo* offshore Korea in a similar role in 1968): the U.S.S. *Oxford*, which was on an intelligence mission collecting electronic emissions and communications intelligence. Its very presence was provocative of attack—whether or not its mission was known to the Cubans (this question seems never addressed in the internal discussions)—since it was often within Cuban territorial waters, 10 miles out, the better to overhear emissions. Late in the Crisis, McNamara recommended it be moved out to or beyond the 12-mile limit, lest it be captured with great loss of intelligence equipment and data.

This ship is only infrequently mentioned in connection with the Crisis (see May & Zelikow, 442, 444, 478, from the tapes), and then mainly to congratulate "someone" for thinking to move it out of harm's way. (check ref) In all the literature on the Crisis, I've never seen anyone make the connection with the de Soto patrol of the Maddox offshore North Vietnam in 1964, which actually provoked the attack on August 2 (and was thought, temporarily, to have provoked an attack on August 4) which served as the excuse for the first air attacks on North Vietnam: the "Tonkin Gulf incidents." (!!)

I suspect that the *Oxford*'s patrol was also code-named a de Soto patrol; at any rate, the mission was identical. And in both cases of Cuba and Vietnam—unlike the

*Pueblo*'s de Soto patrol off Korea—the mission was to chart emissions (radars and defenses) in readiness for air attack and invasion (along with gathering communications intelligence). Moreover, in each case there were ongoing covert operations, including maritime missions, that could be expected to stimulate emissions and communications that could be monitored by the intelligence ship!

Mongoose was the exact parallel to the 34A operations against North Vietnam. The latter were not expected to catalyze an uprising against the DRV—its “police controls” (which were real, though accompanied by popular support for the regime unrealized by the US) were understood to preclude that—whereas that was the nominal objective of Mongoose. But I question whether the Mongoose leadership, including Lansdale, really expected that. The emphasis on the need for US invasion seems to contradict it (though that could have been rationalized by the short time-horizon indicated by Mongoose planning, which aimed at October, 1962).

Just as Ball believed of the de Soto missions in August and September, 1964, Admiral Anderson in 1962 (Hershberg) seemed to regard Mongoose as mainly intended to provoke or simulate a provocation for invasion. I now think that was the main purpose of 34A (though it was never explicitly described in those terms in internal documents). It was, after all, the effect, the only effect, and one regarded with great satisfaction by the Pentagon. Its provocative effect, in the event, depended on its coordination with the de Soto patrol. The North Vietnamese believed the “Marops” (maritime operations) to be coordinated with the destroyer patrols, which was in fact the case, although McNamara denied it to the Senate (while deliberately misdescribing the marops as South Vietnamese operations rather than American operations run by CIA and managed operationally by SOG under the JCS).

Again, no one in the Crisis literature has noted the connection between Northwoods and the Oxford and RFK’s often-cited comment in the first meeting of the ExComm on October 16, to the effect that “We could sink the Maine, or something.” (The revelations of Northwoods is relatively recent, by Bamford and the National Security Archive, which may be why no one has connected it with RFK’s suggestion). RFK was, of course, in charge of Mongoose and familiar with Northwoods. Presumably (this very remark suggests it) he knew of the Oxford’s role and location.

Though the NSA was anxious that the Oxford not be captured (as the Pueblo was in 1968), an attack on it of some sort would be just as desirable and logical as a “provocation” as the daytime attack on the Maddox in 1964.

Bobby’s comment of October 16 is always remarked as a somewhat bizarre, top-of-the-head thought by Little Brother, quickly passed over. Most of the authors were ignorant at the time of writing of Mongoose, of Northwoods, and of Bobby’s key and almost continuous role in supervising Mongoose. (Note that he doesn’t allude to Mongoose in his memoir of the crisis, published posthumously in 1969, perhaps drafted by Sorensen from Bobby’s notes (which might or might not have discussed Mongoose; probably not, from the apparent intent of the memoir; how much did Sorensen know of Mongoose, before or while writing the memoir?)

He held a Mongoose meeting that very afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup>; there are no minutes of this (?), but I wonder if he didn’t pursue this very idea then! He did demand more



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“boom and bang” on the island. No one has raised the question of what the point of this was supposed to be, and why it was so urgent at this particular moment!

I’m conjecturing, strongly, that the whole purpose of Mongoose was to get the Cubans to do something—or to simulate a Cuban action—that would justify an invasion! They surely understood that they were not on the verge of triggering a general uprising against Castro!

In any case, in raising what was one of the Northwoods options for justifying an invasion (probably almost no one in the room was aware of Northwoods, except for the president, McNamara, Bundy and Taylor, perhaps Gilpatric), Bobby was speaking anything but randomly. He had been thinking invasion for over a year. Meanwhile, McNamara had included an attack on an American ship (what but the Oxford would be in their vicinity!) as one of the possible triggers for the invasion planning he directed on October 1 to be ready for execution by October 20!

This whole aspect of the crisis, like some others, must be seen through the lens of what we know happened *just two years later, under very similar circumstances, with almost exactly the same set of decision-makers* (except for the Kennedy brothers): McNamara, Johnson, Bundy, Taylor, Gilpatric (?), Ball, Rusk, McCone, Nitze (in the Navy?): the ExComm! (CHECK MEMBERSHIP) Key here, on covert operations, are Bundy, McNamara.

Perhaps the fact that there was then a different president (though LBJ was earlier part of the ExComm) has prevented scholars from systematically reevaluating the Cuban Crisis and other events under JFK from the perspective of what we know (from the Pentagon Papers, and other sources, including LBJ tapes like those of JFK) about Vietnam. It’s unusual, after all, that two different administrations have so much overlap among high-level officials.

The benefits of comparing the two administrations work both ways: we can understand Vietnam better from the perspective of the much-studied Cuban Crisis, and other crises and events involving almost the same decision-makers. Thus, *both* 34A and the de Soto patrol (and the excuse they provided for escalation) can be seen as working from the template of Mongoose and the Oxford just two years earlier. (Invasion planning for Vietnam didn’t contemplate an opposed landing, for one difference; but air strikes against North Vietnam, with a different purpose than against Cuba, likewise needed “provoking” and justifying.)

The Oxford could have been moved, at will, closer to Havana if need be, as close as necessary to get attacked: just as was contemplated for the de Soto patrols in provocation planning in September, 1964, and was actually planned for February, 1965 (according to McMaster, Dereliction of Duty) but was made unnecessary by the sufficient provocation of Pleiku and Qui Nhon. (The latter, by the way, were helpfully misunderstood, by Bundy and Johnson, as representing a deliberate

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escalation by the Soviets and Ho Chi Minh (Kosygin was in Hanoi at the time) rather than what they were, local actions directed by the NLF. The US saw Ho as the puppet of Moscow, and the NLF as controlled in detail by the DRV.

The DRV would have done well (from my perspective in the Pentagon, as one who did not want to see an air war against North Vietnam and knew that LBJ was skeptical about it himself) to direct the NLF *not* to attack US bases in the South. But since the DRV felt certain (with reason) that the US was about to invade the South anyway and probably attack the North, they weren't actually constraining NLF operations that way.

They could, I believed then, have delayed the onset of Rolling Thunder, the bombing of the North, by refraining from providing the provocation of attacking US bases like Pleiku. So it seemed to me at the time. But actually, since I learned years later that LBJ had already proposed sending US combat troops in December, the JCS would almost surely have prevailed on LBJ to accompany that with air attacks on the North. And if Pleiku had not come along, like a streetcar, another de Soto patrol would have done the job, if necessary sailing into Haiphong. (Maybe that's what Bundy was actually referring to, to Halberstam).

<sup>iv</sup> (Lansdale is accused by his critics of wanting to impress the Kennedys with his ability to give them this political present. But would he really have thought up that target date by himself? That doesn't explain how the invasion planning got the same deadline: especially the last-minute directive of McNamara.

(Note that the October invasion planning, discovered by Hershberg, is little discussed by others: or even, oddly, by Hershberg himself in his encyclopedia article. A key datum in that is the McNamara memo to the Chiefs of October 2, of which I seem to have the only verbatim copy, which I gave to Hershberg.)